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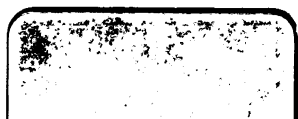
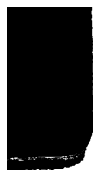
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THE
HOLY WOMEN OF THE GOSPEL:

BEING

A SERIES OF SEVEN LECTURES,

DELIVERED IN

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BY

THE REV. GEORGE NUGEE, M.A.,

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LECTURE I.

INTRODUCTORY.

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“AND MANY WOMEN WERE THERE BEHOLDING AFAR OFF, WHICH FOLLOWED JESUS FROM GALILEE, MINISTERING UNTO HIM: AMONG WHICH WAS MARY MAGDALENE, AND MARY THE MOTHER OF JAMES AND JOSES, AND THE MOTHER OF ZEBEDEE’S CHILDREN.”

OF the holy women whose praises are in the Gospel, those blessed few whom we know by name out of the many others unknown to us who followed CHRIST,—of these the three Marys are the chief. It would seem that they, but especially His holy mother, were nearly always with Him. They followed, ministering to Him from Galilee. They followed Him up the hill of Calvary, mingling their tears with His blood. They stood at the foot of the Cross gazing on His last sufferings. They went at the rising of the sun to the sepulchre to anoint as they thought His lifeless body. Such was the love and devotion of those holy women.

SECOND SERIES.]

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And what of those others whose names are associated with the early history of CHRIST? What if Elisabeth and Anna were not followers of our LORD in His life of suffering? still did they minister to His infant sorrows, showing, the former by the grace of her lowly character at the salutation of Mary, the latter by her devout waiting for CHRIST in the Temple, that they are worthy to form part of that blessed company who follow the Lamb in heaven.

Hence it is that I have chosen this general text for my Introductory Lecture to-day; for to follow CHRIST up the hill of Calvary, to minister to Him in His poor and penitent ones, to lament His sorrows on the Cross, this is not the work of the three Marys only, but the work of all holy women in all ages of the Church.

Take your stand then, with me on this mystical hill of sorrows:—beneath you, as it were, at different intervals you see the train of CHRIST's toiling followers. Widows like Anna, ever praying, ever fasting, ever watching for CHRIST. Mothers like the Virgin Mary and Elisabeth, sweet models of that lowliness which marks the pure handmaid of the LORD. Sisters, like Martha and Mary, showing by their combined characters how we may serve in the world and yet sit at Jesus' feet. And lastly, penitents, like Mary Magdalene, whose love was only equalled by the greatness of her absolution.

And if anything were still wanted to prove that

these holy women were intended to serve as models for Christian women in all ages of the Church, it would be found, I think, in this fact, that they embrace the two great divisions of female life, I mean the social and the religious. We have mothers and sisters on the one hand, we have the penitent and the widow on the other. Nay, if we look only at the group of the three Marys beneath the Cross, we shall find that they were all different in their course of life,—virgin chastity, holy marriage, and the discipline of a sinner, are their three respective states. But whatever their degrees of holiness, they all submit to the rule of the Cross, they all three follow CHRIST up the hill of sorrows, they all meet at last beneath the Cross. Hence the meaning of S. Cyril, “the female sex is capable of the greatest devotion to CHRIST, but needeth great self-discipline.” And another writer observes in allusion to the same, “that women are infirm by nature, but by grace they are found to follow JESUS to the last in the way of sorrows.” “O blessed women,” he cries, “the strong and the great are regardless of CHRIST’s bitter sorrows, or only know them to add to them; but GOD gathers you around Him to follow His footsteps, to witness His agony, to receive His dying words.”

It is, then, only in their character as devout followers of CHRIST; as they reflect the several graces of His adorable Passion, that I would now venture to speak of the holy women of the Gospel: it is not to draw any comparison between them and the

female saints of the Old Testament; neither is it to enter into the question of the relative capacities of the two sexes for a saintly life. For whatever may have been the effect of the fall on the relative condition of Adam and Eve,—whether before this they were equal, as some have thought, in powers of mind and capacity of soul,—one thing at least is now most certain, that in the new creation we are all equal in God's eyes. "For as many of you as have been baptized into CHRIST have put on CHRIST: there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in CHRIST JESUS."

In treating, then, of these holy women,—which I would wish to do, not with learning, but in love,—my object is to enter into their lives and characters so far only as they reflect some one or more of the graces of our regeneration. To-day, however, I shall confine myself to a general outline of the whole group; purposing, as I do, to fill up one figure or character on each successive week throughout Lent.

Now, I have already said that the holy women in the Gospel are intended to set before you this great truth: that, whatever may be the lot of your life,—whether it be domestic, as parents or sisters, or religious, properly so called, as widows and penitent attendants on CHRIST in some house of charity,—in either case you are under the rule of the Cross. You must carry the Cross, that is, into your domestic as well as devotional duties; you must be like the holy women of old, "daily followers of CHRIST;" imitating Him in the grace of

His heavenly character ; ministering to Him in all good works ; and, as at this season of the Passion, sorrowing and lamenting those sins in yourselves and others which were the actual cause of His death.

And here I would have you remember, that if you profess to follow CHRIST at all, you must do so as those holy women did, with a good heart ; you must not falter or hesitate in your love or obedience. "Remember Lot's wife," said our LORD. "Her sin," it has been said, "was not that she went back from her leading angel ; but that she looked back : " her heart was not right within her. Even while her feet were pressing forward to the city of her refuge,—even while she held on to the hand of her spiritual guide,—she hankered in her mind after the world below ; her face was towards Zoar, but her heart was in Sodom.

And this unchanged bent of her heart found expression in a mere glance. "She looked back," it is said ; and that forbidden look lost her the hope of heaven : it betrayed what was within—a worldly heart and a still unchastened will.

To you, then, who are being rescued out of the world, as it were, by some angel sent to you from God, whether it be a parent, guardian, or spiritual guide, follow onwards, I would say, nothing doubting of the way. If you are young, it may appear to be steep at first ; if old, it may cost you some sacrifice of early habits ; but whether old or

young, look upwards, look onwards ; seek, like the stricken S. Paul, some one to guide you by the hand, and then go on ; escape for your life ; do not for a moment look back. CHRIST, Whom you have promised to follow, is your refuge and stronghold. He is as that Zoar in the mountains, and it is His angel or messenger that guides you on the road to heaven ; snatching you as brands out of the burning city of the plain below.

And yet, what is your present obedience ? O test it now by the hill of Calvary ! Look at those holy women : who of you is so inflexibly attached to CHRIST as they ?—so determined as they in following Him ? Do you never halt ? do you never look aside ? do you never look back ? You renounce the world, for instance, now, during these few weeks of Lent ; you join awhile the holy company of women who follow Him, and minister to Him in His poor ; but what when Easter shall have come again ? O, you know not your danger ! As the angel said to the women of Lot's family, so to you I would cry, Flee from the world ; flee from the evil of it. Your flight, remember, is really from death and fire ; but remember also what such flight involves : what pain, what perseverance, what constant following of CHRIST ! Our natural bias is to be ever declining from CHRIST, to let go His guiding hand, to forget His saving Cross. There is something within which is ever beckoning us back ; weakening our intentions, placing new difficulties before us ; putting stumbling-blocks and

false excuses in our way: in other words, it requires the utmost energy of purpose, the deepest devotion and vigilance of soul, to take up our cross daily and to follow **CHRIST**.

Such for instance, is the effect of those small sins, which most young persons allow themselves in: those slight tamperings with conscience; those half resolutions of forsaking a bad habit; the dwelling in thought only on evil; all these give a backward bias to the will; and if the will be once biassed or turned, there is nothing short of God's special grace to hinder the full work of spiritual declension; nay, He may send His Angel in after years and hurry you from the burning; but in vain, the world has done its work with the heart. You may go a little distance upward with the Angel, give up a little of the habitual way of your worldly life. But soon comes the secret failing of heart: then the rebel wish to return, then the open look backwards, and so comes the pillar of salt;—**GOD**, that is, fixes the sinner to the spot, confirms him in his settled, vicious desires. What then is to keep you under trials or temptations from falling back? What, but that which has upheld the Saints?—namely, the thought of Him Who went before them. Hence it was that they would mark even the roads of this world with the sign of the Passion, the Cross of **CHRIST**. They gathered strength and life from the sight of His beaming love. They beheld that fainting famished Form before them, and gathered strength every step from His weakness;

the Cross which crushed the Holy JESUS to the earth, was the very stay of those who followed Him. In short, such was their love, so great their devotion to CHRIST,—so completely had they surrendered themselves to Him that they had no one passing desire to turn back. They remembered those warning words, and were held in the heavenly path, “if any man put his hand to the plough and look back, the same is not fit for the kingdom of heaven.”

The general duty, then, which I would seek to enforce during this Lent is that you be instant followers of CHRIST:—and if you would inquire, how can I best become so, in what particulars? I would bid you imitate the holy women in the Gospel even as they also imitated CHRIST. Are you for instance mothers? Look then to the graces of the Virgin Mary and Elisabeth; in them, but especially in the Holy Mother of our LORD, you will find the holiest purest model for a Christian mother. Are you sisters? come here then, and enter the house of Bethany, the home of Martha and Mary; in that household you may at once learn how to make the world subordinate to religion, and the affection for a sister or any relative secondary to the Love of CHRIST.

Are you a widow? The HOLY SPIRIT Himself leads you into the Temple, and points you to the aged Anna. He bids you observe her fastings and watchings day and night in that sanctuary; her patient waiting for the consolation; her Eucharistic

joy at the presence of the Holy Babe. She who had been a widow fourscore and four years had no excuse for daily absence from the House of her God: and now behold she worships the Lamb in eternal light, for of the Temple in heaven, we know that its gates are not shut at all by day, and there is no night there, "for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the Light thereof."

And lastly, are you a penitent? have you, like Mary Magdalene, been forgiven much? O strive then to imitate her love, which was the first-fruit as it was the evidence of her repentance; hence her caresses of CHRIST's feet, and costly sacrifice of ointment: and now her love has found its reward both in heaven and in earth, "For wheresoever this Gospel is preached in all the world, there shall this thing which she hath done be told for a memorial of her."

Finally then, I would now close this Introductory Lecture with the account of one who in her life and death would seem to have reflected in a pre-eminent degree the graces of those holy women. It is the account of a lady of noble birth, whose lot was cast early in "an age of profligacy," as it is said in the manuscript of the holy man from whom I gather it, "when it was a reputed crime to follow religion; an assured danger to be an obedient daughter to her tender mother the Church of England." Speaking then of her domestic character, he says that, "As a mother, she was most tender and careful; embracing all her children with the caresses of nature

and religion, tempering her authority as a parent with all the meekness of the handmaid of the LORD."

So again of her widowhood, "The first woman," he says, "who received CHRIST in the Temple was the Prophetess Anna, a widow of fourscore and four years, yet more full of zeal even than years, for she was fixed to the Temple as the stars to their orbits, and never forsook it night or day. And this most honourable lady, whom we come now to entomb or rather to enshrine, may well be looked upon as her parallel,—if not in the years, yet in the devotion of her widowhood, for she honoured and frequented the church of GOD with as public and frequent zeal as any of the most primitive and Apostolic widowhood." "Yet was she," he adds, "of such a saintly conversation, as well without as within the sacred cloisters, that she made all her household, as it were, holy ground; her chamber was her chapel, where she was ever on her knees in secret communion with GOD. And at last GOD's messenger came to summon her away; in the midst of pining agonies her patience stood unshaken in the face of death,—strong in saintly faith, and with a Martyr's courage, she kept close to her GOD, as if she would conquer death before she encountered him; in a word, "neither life nor death, nor any other creature was able to separate her from the Love of CHRIST,—from a dutiful obedience to His Church, and a patient bearing of His Cross."

LECTURE II.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

S. LUKE I. 38.

“AND MARY SAID, BEHOLD THE HANDMAID OF THE
LORD.”

IN treating of the holy women in the Gospel, the first name that rises in the devout mind is that of Mary. She comes first of all women in the order of affection, as the Mother of our LORD; and through Him, I may add, our own holy Mother: for we are all “His brethren and sisters, bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh.”

But she also comes first in point of honour: heaven and earth unite in proclaiming her blessed among women. This, I say, is not only the salutation of Elisabeth on earth, but of the angel Gabriel from heaven. She is emphatically “the blessed among women;” and never, as we may well conceive, had a more perfect creature been born on the

earth from the hour that Eve came forth from the moulding hand of God.

Eve, we know, was without the spot of sin at her creation; this, indeed, we dare not say of Mary. With all her love for the Virgin Mother, the Church Catholic has ever held that, in respect of original sin, Mary was too true a daughter of Eve; but in other respects we may well speak of her as of the Spouse in the Canticles: "Thou art all fair; there is no spot in Thee."

And when we remember what an instrument she was in the hands of God,—how in the person of her SON she crushed the serpent's head,—"for Eve," writes S. Irenæus, "was the cause of the ruin of the human race, but Mary the cause, so far as she was a mother, of saving it;" when we remember, too, the spotless purity of that SON of Whom she was the Mother, we may almost tremble, though we dare not hesitate, to attach the idea of original sin to such a being. That precious Blood, it has been said in awful language, which flowed from the Cross for the expiation of our sins, and which is still the spiritual, mystical, ineffable drink indeed of our souls,—that Blood had flowed in the first instance in the heart of His Mother. That Flesh, which was torn and sacrificed on Calvary, and which is still the spiritual food of our souls, the pledge of the future resurrection of our bodies,—that Flesh was derived in the first instance from His Mother. In short, Mary was the direct, miraculous instrument by which the union between the

Divine and human natures was wrought in the one CHRIST, through the operation of the HOLY GHOST.

“O incomprehensible miracle!” cries S. Cyril, “who is able to declare her praise?” “You,” he says, addressing the Nestorians, who had incurred the judgment of the Council of Ephesus for denying the title “Mother of God,”—“you,” he says, “have cavilled; but for our part let us venerate the ever-blessed Virgin Mary; let us adore her Immaculate Son.”

But it is not my wish to dwell on the mysteries of the birth or even the sorrows of this holy mother: of the latter, indeed, I would hope to speak in connection with the sorrows of JESUS in the holy week. My object in this lecture is simply to set forth what is revealed to us of the graces of her heavenly character; to set them forth in detail as the model for Christian women both young and old, in every age of the Church: for I may say even of those other holy women in the Gospel of whom I am to speak, that they do but reflect one or more of those female graces which beam, as it were, from the character of the Mother of our LORD.

Now the quality of mind,—the one special grace which marked the Blessed Virgin Mother,—is that of meekness: I mean that mild maiden spirit, of which the chief elements, I think, are lowliness—or a mean estimate of self—and chastened fear. Indeed, if it had been for us to choose a character

which was meet to be so "highly favoured" of God as she was; if it had been for us, as men, to say who is meet to be called "the most blessed" among women, it had been Mary, in her low estate: her temper, her mild and gentle spirit, were meet, if any could be, for the overshadowing of the HOLY SPIRIT of God.

This is evident, I think, not only from the fact of God Himself having chosen her out of the world to be the Mother of the Incarnate SON, but from various incidents of her own life, and expressions of her own lips, which, however few, serve at least to mark her character.

For here I would remark how little we really know of her; how little has been announced to us save the message of the angel Gabriel. One had thought, indeed, that a mother so blessed, a soul so holy as she was, would have had a far more prominent part in Holy Writ,—that her praise had been in every page of the Gospel: but no; little is said in direct praise of her. Beyond the circumstances of CHRIST's birth and infancy, we hear but little of her life. The glory of the Annunciation seems to have been deemed enough; and perhaps we may say, with a holy writer, that had "the Blessed Mary been more fully disclosed to us in the heavenly beauty and sweetness of the spirit within her, she indeed would have been honoured, her gifts had been clearly seen, but at the same time the Giver of those gifts had been somewhat less contemplated." The SON had been less

glorious by the side of His more than saintly Mother.


And here I would not be understood as wishing to detract aught from the glory which truly belongs to the Virgin Mary, she is indeed "the most blessed among women;" as a holy Father of the Church observes, "she was a chosen vessel, and endowed with eminent sanctity, still she was a woman partaking of our common nature, but deserving of the highest honours shown to the saints of God. She stands before them all on account of the heavenly mystery accomplished in her."

But my object is chiefly to dwell not on her high prerogative as the most blessed of women, but on that one quality of mind which we know to have been hers, I mean her maidenly meekness. And here we need go no further than her own words to the Angel for evidence, and to her own sweet song for illustration of this her characteristic meekness of soul,—these will alone show that she was possessed in an eminent degree of those two chief elements of a meek character, I mean, lowliness, and reverential fear.

1. Look, then, at her lowly estimate of self, for it was after the angel Gabriel had saluted her and explained to her in some measure the nature of the high blessing which awaited her, that she bowed to the message from heaven;—mystery as it was, and almost inconceivable, she bowed to it, and said, "Behold the handmaid of the LORD, be it unto me according to thy word."

And could words express more sweetly the voluntary humility of the saint? "Behold the handmaid of the LORD!" she does not say in wonder, at the transcendent glory which was to be hers, "Behold the mother of my LORD," that title was one which Elisabeth could give her; it was not for her in her maiden lowliness to take it,—when Elisabeth, I say, saluted her, she could say, "whence is this that the mother of my LORD should come to me?" but Mary would not say so; "blessed and highly favoured" as she was, she could only call herself "the handmaid of the LORD." In her the destinies of our race were to be reversed, and the head of the serpent crushed; on her was to be bestowed the greatest honour, the highest espousals which could be vouchsafed to any creature. The HOLY GHOST was to overshadow her, GOD Himself, her Creator, was to take upon Him her virgin substance, and yet she bursts out into no raptures. We seem to see her as Christian art has loved to represent her, humbly kneeling in the presence of the Angel Gabriel, with her arms meekly crossed on her breast, waiting in lowliness and awe the voice of Annunciation and the overshadowing of the Dove.

And that this was her usual spirit, the natural posture, if I may so speak, of her mind; that it was not inspired simply by the awfulness of the Annunciation itself,—this may be seen, I think, by a reference to the words of her own song, "My soul doth magnify the LORD, and my spirit hath



rejoiced in God my SAVIOUR, for He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden." Observe the very words which I have used, lowliness and handmaiden, or as it is in our Bible version, "low estate," a translation, I would observe, which marks her deep humility far more clearly than the other, for it was her lowliness and condition of life that she herself intended here to express as a grace, not her own transcendent humility, which, if she had intended to express, she had lost; but no, by overlooking that virtue of her mind, and fixing her thought on her mean and unworthy condition, which God had Himself given her, she indeed exercised that humility of which she was the true owner. To adopt the words of a Roman Catholic commentator, "Mary did not in this place profess but practise humility, it was not the design of the most humble and holy Virgin to declare that by her merits she obtained so great a benefit, but rather to profess herself of a condition utterly unworthy of such a favour." In fact, nothing is more clear than that a feeling of "inexpressible unworthiness," a sense of humility amounting almost to utter abasement was from the moment of the Annunciation the one leading feature of her mind.

We can imagine her, and love will often picture her to our imagination before that event—surrounded by her fellow maidens, the espoused of Joseph, one of the few remaining daughters of David's line, humble in lot, lowly in mind, light in

heart, full of beaming love to God, but little dreaming of His own ineffable love for her; all this, I say, we can imagine,—it is but the picture of Miriam or any other Jewish maiden. But from the hour of the Angel's visit she seems weighed down by the weight of glory which was upon her, while even after the Nativity she gives evidence of the same oppressed spirit in her inward musings; for while others wondered and expressed their wonder, spreading abroad the saying which had been told them of the shepherds concerning the Holy Babe, "Mary," we are told, "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." O blessed mother! she could not express her deep feelings on the mystery, she would feed on it in the secret reverence of her heart; it was in her soul that she would magnify the LORD, in her spirit only that she would rejoice in GOD her SAVIOUR. Her humility was still seen in her holy silence. While Elizabeth could cry out "with a loud voice," as S. Luke tells us, and salute Mary as the mother of her LORD, "the blessed among women," Mary herself would commune only with her own heart, and in her secret chamber and be still.

And is there, I would now ask, any quality of mind so becoming to you as that modesty or lowliness which was the chief jewel in Mary's crown? Remember, sisters in CHRIST, what S. Paul says in the second chapter, of his first epistle to Timothy, "Let the woman learn in silence;" as if he had the picture of Mary before him as she sat ponder-

ing in her quiet home. And then in the last verse of the same chapter he adds the promise of a blessing, which every mother should remember as due to, or rather to be dated from, the child-bearing of Mary. "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing," if, as the Apostle adds, and this is the great lesson, "if they continue in faith, and charity, and holiness, and modesty:" as if he had said, "If they follow the graces of Mary, her modesty, her sobriety, her holy meekness and faith, they shall be blessed in their travail, even as she was in the sorrows of her soul."

II. But I would now speak of that other element of Mary's meekness—I mean a holy and chastened fear. And this also, if I mistake not, may be gathered from her conversation with the angel Gabriel, as well as from the words of her own song. For when the angel had come in unto her and saluted her "Hail, thou that art highly favoured; the LORD is with thee: blessed art thou among women," she was troubled, we are told, at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be. Indeed, so greatly troubled does she seem to have been at the Annunciation, that the angel set himself immediately to calm her fears. "Fear not, Mary," he said, "for thou hast found favour with God."

Here, then, was that special grace of fear of which I would speak; a fear which, when duly chastened by love, is the very soul of the devout and meek spirit. "Perfect love," we know, "hath no fear."

Hence it is we speak of a holy, chastened fear: not fear simply in itself, which would be torment; but a fear somewhat of the nature of veneration,—as that of S. John, for instance, in the presence of the angel in the Apocalypse; or David, when he says, “In Thy fear will I worship towards Thy holy Temple.”

This, then, I think, is another and essential element in Mary’s meek and holy temper which I would bid every handmaid of the LORD study to imitate. For it was not the mere presence of the angel, remember, which startled her; this had been weak, womanly fear: no, it was not only his sight, but his saying, rather, which troubled her. “The LORD is with thee.” What could this mean? “How could God dwell with one so weak, so mean as I am? What mystery is this, that my LORD should come unto me?”

She could not, as yet, grasp the mystery; her fears, her misgivings, are all too great for her hopes. Every daughter of Judah, we know, was ever praying that she might be the Blessed Mother of the MESSIAH; it was a hope familiar to the daughters of Jerusalem, especially at the time of the appearing of CHRIST; for the fulfilment of the seventy weeks of Daniel, and other prophecies, had raised a general expectation of the coming Birth.

Hence, perhaps, much of that conflict of hope and fear which arose in Mary’s mind at the message of the angel. She hoped, indeed, it might be

true of her. O it was, indeed, a rapturous thought, to think that she might be the chosen Mother of her LORD! But, looking at her rank, her poverty, her lowliness of life, she could not get herself at the moment to believe it. Her humility prevailed against her hopes; and the general result in her mind was, it would seem, a complex, undefined fear of the mystery. It was only afterwards, we find, when the angel had retired, and she herself had sought the society of Elisabeth,—it was only then, I say, that she could dare say, “Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed; for He that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is His Name.”

Look, then, to this holy Virgin Mother in respect of this grace; imitate her in it, as she herself would invite you: for, as if she would impress all others of her sex with the beauty of holy fear, which in her own case had found such grace with God, she adds, “And His mercy is on them that fear Him throughout all generations.”

Yes, God’s mercy is on them that fear Him throughout all generations—all ages of the Church. The favour which Mary found may, in its degree, be found of you all; there is no mother, daughter, or sister in CHRIST, who has the fear, the holy, chastened fear of Mary, but may have somewhat of Mary’s grace on earth, and her future glory in the presence of the angels in heaven. “Only sanctify the LORD God in your hearts,” as

S. Peter says, and be ready always to give an answer of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. "Only pass your time of sojourning here," as the same Apostle says in a former verse, "in fear," and you will not lose your reward with Mary in heaven.

For now that she is "with the Lord," and blessed not only among women, but among angels, and perhaps even above them, her love is perfected; she has no more fear—it is cast aside, except so far as it is an element of her adoration; for even the seraphim, we are told, do veil their faces in trembling ecstasy at the glory which they adore,—but fear, as such, is not found in heaven where all is perfect love. Still, it is true that holy fear is one of the graces which must lead you to heaven. They who would "perfect holiness" must do so, as the Apostle says, "in the fear of God."

O learn, then, I repeat, of Mary, if it be only this grace of fear. Her lowliness of heart, her deep humility of soul may be beyond you; but you all may be partakers of her godly fear: fear, for instance, lest any evil thought defile your body, which is even now the temple of the indwelling SPIRIT; fear, lest you should lose the blessings of so awful a mystery as that of your regeneration, or new birth in CHRIST. For GOD, remember, still sends His HOLY SPIRIT on the children of men; there is even now an Annunciation for every true mother in CHRIST; there is even now an overshadowing of the HOLY GHOST at Baptism; and that child of

yours, which is born in CHRIST, is he not, I would ask, a child of GOD,—a holy thing ?

O fear, then, if not for yourselves, fear lest any evil of your own should undo the work of your child's regeneration. "For the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband," saith S. Paul, "else were your children unclean; but now are they holy."

Such, then, are two or three graces which, as they are the distinguishing ornaments of Mary's character, so should they be of yours. "Behold," we say, "the handmaid of the LORD:" partaking in her degree of her LORD's own attributes as the meek and lowly JESUS; ever thoughtful as He was, pondering in her heart the secret things of GOD; ever obedient, as she proved herself, for instance, at the marriage feast; ever afflicted, as CHRIST was, bearing in her heart, and travailing, as it were, again with His sorrows, even unto the end.

Such, I say, was Mary, from the hour of the Annunciation to the dark hour of her Son's Cross; "one of those of whom it has been well said, that they go on in a calm and quiet course, learning day by day, amid the silent duties of life, to love Him Who is their LORD. And O, if we, through the unspeakable gift of GOD's HOLY SPIRIT, have in any measure followed the Virgin Mary's meekness in our youth, let us so far bless Him Who enabled us to do so. But so far as we are conscious of having failed of her blessed example, O let us now at least bewail our pride of heart.

For what hath she herself told us in her song of joy? "He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts." "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek." Yes, it is a sad truth, but one which we must all have felt in ourselves, or seen in others, "Pride cometh before a fall." "They who are meek shall inherit the earth; such as are gentle, them shall He learn His way." GOD'S honour, GOD'S love, GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT will not tabernacle with inveterate pride of heart. Be it man or woman that exalt themselves, they have no part with Mary or JESUS, either in this life or in the life to come.

Finally, then, come now and kneel in meekness at that altar, in the presence of the angels, and realise the mystery of the Annunciation, even the Incarnation of the Blessed JESUS by His most holy Virgin Mother; for that mystery is still accomplished in all who receive CHRIST into their souls. And then I would say,—and it is to you who are mothers that I especially say it,—take to your homes the sweet example of Mary; ponder the graces of her saintly character; picture her to yourselves as the meek maiden of the Annunciation, the fond mother at Bethlehem, the quiet housewife at Nazareth: in one and all her characters see in her your model of all that is lovely and of good report in the female character. In short, realise in your own daily lives somewhat more of her meekness; that lowliness of heart and

fear which pre-eminently was hers, and then, what shall be your crown of rejoicing? What can I promise you?—that which is our own hope, though I know not how to realise it; that which is our daily prayer, though I scarcely dare to utter it; to see that holy meek Mother one day face to face; to be counted worthy, through the merits of her dear Son, to bear her company in heaven, though it be as the least of the saints, the last and lowest of them all.

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LECTURE III.

ELISABETH.

S. LUKE I. 43.

"AND WHENCE IS THIS TO ME THAT THE MOTHER OF
MY LORD SHOULD COME TO ME?"

IN treating as I did on Friday last of the Blessed Virgin Mother, I said but little of the mystery of her birth; still less of her sorrows. I confined myself mainly to that quality of meekness which makes her the sweet model for holy women in every age of the Church. And indeed the lesson which I would derive to-day from the character of her cousin Elisabeth, is in part one of humility; but that which is the more distinguishing feature of Elisabeth, that in which she reflects more distinctly the kindred mind of the Virgin Mother, is her faith; in this respect, the name of Elisabeth is sacred in the devout memory of the Church: she was the first to recognize the unseen Presence of the In-

carnate SON ; she was foremost to salute the Virgin Mary by that which is her highest title, both in heaven and earth, "Mother of our LORD," in fact, it was from her lips that the Church has joyfully caught up and echoed on from age to age that most stupendous title. For the Council of Ephesus in the fifth century did not invent that title, but simply approved it as already found in Scripture ; it was the early utterance, they said, of the HOLY GHOST. "The Mother of our LORD," they declared, "is of the same august import as 'Mother of GOD ;' whence the Martyr Ignatius did not shrink from saying, that 'our GOD JESUS CHRIST was conceived of Mary.'"

Such then was the full meaning of that title by which Elisabeth was the first to salute the Holy Virgin Mother, "whence is this to me that the Mother of my LORD should come to me?" And O, what deep thoughts, what glorious hopes must it have given rise to during the three months' visit of Mary ! Here were those two holy women, both of them "full of the HOLY GHOST," both of them "chosen vessels of grace ;" the one the Mother of the Incarnate SON of GOD, the other the mother of His great forerunner, the Baptist.

O how must they have hung wondering on the lips of the aged Zacharias, as he displayed to them the magnificent array of Types and Prophecies by which the HOLY SPIRIT had foretold their respective glories. "Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His Name Immanuel,

that is, God with us;" what thoughts must those prophetic words have given rise to in Mary's mind! how must she have pondered them in her heart! So too of Elisabeth, in reference to her wonderful son, "Behold, I will send My Messenger, who shall prepare the way before Me," and "he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

How must Elisabeth have compared those words of the Prophet with the Angel's annunciation to Zacharias, "He shall be great in the sight of the LORD, and many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the LORD their GOD." O well then might Zacharias exclaim, "He hath performed the mercy promised to our forefathers;" well might Mary too exclaim, "He hath holpen His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy as He spake to our fathers." Well might they all three exclaim in the words of Elisabeth, "Blessed is she that believed, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the LORD."

Now I have said that Elisabeth reflects the humility, but more especially the faith of the Virgin Mother; these, as I shall now endeavour to show, are the two sweetest features of her character, while in one point, she is a special example to Christian mothers. I mean that they ought by separation and devotion, to seek the sanctification of their children, even before their birth, for as it is the curse of Eve to "conceive in sin," and "bring

forth in sorrow," such a time should be a season of mortification and prayer for the removal of that curse; and not only that, but for the preparation also of their own hearts to the right nurturing of their promised children. Whence it is especially said of Elisabeth, "that after her conception she hid herself," and of the child of her conception, that "he remained in the desert until the time of his showing unto Israel."

But I would speak of her humility. And here let us go in spirit to the house of Zacharias: it is a scene of joy and sweet affection; it is the arrival of Mary which occasions such transports; no sooner has she arrived, no sooner have her footsteps been heard on the threshold, than Elisabeth feels the infant which she bare, to leap and exult with joy within her. O strange miracle! we may well exclaim, what does it mean! often indeed had there been anticipations in the womb of nature of the Coming Birth.

The curse of sorrow, it has been said, had passed on our mother earth, and from the hour of that curse, there had been the prophetic anticipation of CHRIST's Birth, or "the new Creation of God," but what was all this consciousness of His approach compared with the miracle before us! what then I ask again, does the miracle mean? "The HOLY GHOST," answers S. Augustine, "doth thereby reveal to Elisabeth, what the exultation of the infant doth signify, namely, that the Mother had come of Him for whom the whole creation had been groan-

ing and travailing in pain." And now mark the humility of Elisabeth; "whence is this to me," she cries, "that the Mother of my LORD should come to me?" O what deep humility is comprised in these few words! Elisabeth the holy mother of the Baptist, of whom the Angel had said, that "he should be great,"—of whom our LORD Himself afterwards declared that "of those who are born of women there is not a greater than John the Baptist."—She who had herself been the object of a miraculous conception—even she is confounded at the approach of the Holy Mother; she forgets at once every privilege to which she was entitled by ties of blood: she sets aside the reverence due to her greater age; in a word, she sees in faith the Mother of her LORD, and in her humility she forgets herself. O sweet omen of that self-abasement which was to mark her own most wonderful son! "He must increase," said S. John Baptist, of CHRIST, "but I must decrease," and again, "There standeth one among you Whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. Yes, the humility of Elisabeth is well seen in the inborn spirit of her son; in that self-abasement and holy serenity of soul which marked that lowly messenger of the Cross. And what better test could you have, in any age, of a holy Mother than the living witness of a holy Son? it is from the mother, we believe, that the child for the most part derives the deepest because the earliest impressions; it is as though the child by constant gazing up into the

countenance caught the lines of the mother's character: it is as though the greater the love of that mother, the closer her embrace, so much nearer the likeness between herself and her child; and this is especially true of sons, indeed, it is a holy maxim amongst us, "that a great man has always a good mother." Hence we may say of Elisabeth, that it was first her love as a mother, and then her humility as a saint, that wrought by God's help and grace the severe character of S. John; the desert, the rock, the rough food, the separation from home, a lone life, all this she knew from the Angel was to be the early portion of her child, and she bowed to the decree of heaven.

And yet what a trial to a fond mother! which of you could have the heart thus to sacrifice, as the world would say, your only child? Nay, which of you is not now pampering perhaps that your child which God hath given you, even while you profess to have designed him, if not devoted him even before his birth to the service of CHRIST! O believe me, this is not your work as holy mothers in CHRIST! if you indeed believe that you are called to give your son to the Church; if you think that you are led by the HOLY SPIRIT to do so, O let not any fondness, much less any pride or self-pleasing hinder that work: give the child of your affection, the child perhaps of your old age, give it to CHRIST at once, without any fond reserve: train him, that is, as another Elisabeth would for the severe work of the Messenger of the Cross; who

knows but that when the hour shall come for his showing unto Israel,—he may fulfil some high mission of heaven, of which you now but little dream; to call the Church again to her first works, perhaps to be a messenger in the spirit if not power of Elias to prepare the way for the Coming of CHRIST to judgment.

But secondly, I would speak of the faith of Elisabeth. Now this is at once seen in her recognition of the unseen CHRIST, “Whence is this to me that the Mother of my LORD should come to me?” she renders homage to the Presence of the hidden SAVIOUR, she proclaims the blessedness of Mary’s faith, while she herself imitates it. “Blessed,” she cries, “is she that believed, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the LORD.” And what is this faith in the future promises of GOD? what is this faith in the unseen Presence of CHRIST but the very soul of all our religion? CHRIST, we know, is no less hidden in His Temple, than He was in the sanctuary of His Mother’s womb. That was the first, the most holy shrine of the Incarnate Word; but He is verily and indeed present with us in the Church when veiled under the Sacrament of His Body and Blood. That which the Angel of the Annunciation proclaimed was not more truly the work of the HOLY GHOST, than that spiritual Sacramental Presence of which I now speak.

Is your faith then as lively as that of Elisabeth? is it animated by a devotion as quick, as burning as

was hers? do your hearts, as it were, leap with joy at the Presence of your LORD? O my brethren and sisters in CHRIST, the children of this world can enter our Temples; they can approach our holy shrines without the least emotion. They can gaze, they can partake, they can assist in the Sacrifice without the soul of beating love and devotion.

And why is this? whence comes all this indifference to the tremendous mystery of CHRIST's presence? It is from want of faith; they cannot, will not embrace the awful mystery which tabernacles in the Church, in short, we might say to them what the son of Elisabeth said to the unbelieving Jews, "In the midst of you is One Whom ye know not." O if the thought then of holy Elisabeth do nothing more, let it at least quicken your faith in the unseen.

And here I would remind you from her example, that GOD will not accept a cold, calculating faith. Love was the quickening soul of her faith, it must be the soul of yours; the very sound of CHRIST's Name, much more the consciousness of His Presence should quicken the liveliest emotions of your heart. Thus of Elisabeth we may well conceive that she was quite intoxicated with joy. Like Hannah in the temple, she was, as it were, inebriated by the HOLY SPIRIT, her whole being was moved to and fro with an ecstasy of devotion, while her voice cried aloud with the tongue of prophecy, the ready utterance of a heaven-inspired faith. And so is it in a degree

with the really devout soul when in the presence of CHRIST.

The early Fathers speak of the quickened faith of those initiated in the sacred mysteries, as a kind of inebriation of the HOLY SPIRIT. No cold, dead, reasoning acceptance of the mystery, but a rapturous emotion of the whole soul; whence it is that the Holy Scriptures, they say, contrast the "being drunk with wine," and "being filled with the HOLY SPIRIT," the one being a figure of the intense rapture of the other.

Now I know that this is the language of the Saints, men of such deep devotion as I cannot hope that either you or myself should ever attain unto; but of this I would remind you that there is much in your natural temperament of mind as women to feed such high devotion, nay, there is a warmth of affection in the female character which we do not look for in that of man: the love of S. John would seem indeed to have been akin to it; his was a less masculine affection than that of S. Peter, but O how far more constant! Of S. John we know that his love alone stood firm at the Cross with that of the Holy Virgin Mother and other ministering women.

And this is true not only of the holy women in the Gospel, but of saintly women in every age of the Church. Look, for instance, at S. Elisabeth of Hungary, S. Catherine of Siena, S. Theresa of Spain,—although there is much, I admit, of romance and legend about their lives, still no one can doubt

their burning faith and devotion. Whence it is that the last of them, S. Theresa, is always represented in the paintings of the Church as holding a burning heart of Jesus and looking up in rapture at the Holy Dove. What then if the joy of Elisabeth was miraculous and inspired even as the angel had said, "Thou shalt have great joy," still you may also aspire to that which S. Athanasius so beautifully calls "our joy in the mysteries," or S. Ambrose in still stronger language, "that blessed inebriation which infuseth joy, which awakeneth earnestness in our souls, which hasteneth the fruits of faith and pure devotion."

Such then was the saintly Elisabeth in her life; and had GOD permitted us to know somewhat of her thoughts and acts in death, we should, no doubt, have seen her exulting to the very last in that love which is the soul of faith. But her death, like that of the Virgin Mary, is hidden from our eyes, as if GOD had indeed, as some say, taken both her and that Holy Mother; as if in reward for their common humility, their last hours had been alike hid with CHRIST in GOD.

O blessed Elisabeth! how must she exult now at the sight of CHRIST and His blessed Mother. What songs, what salutations must the heavenly threshold now resound with at the union again of two such holy souls. The same now that they were on earth, known by the same blessed names, marked by the same sweet graces, O how must they shine amongst the saints and angels of

GOD! Think for a moment, think, O ye women, what the beauty of that Virgin Mother must be now in heaven whose angelic meekness was so transcendent on the earth. Think too of the saintly Elisabeth, what must her devotion of soul be now that her faith has realised the unseen, now that the Incarnate SON of GOD is before her, no longer hid, but face to face. O what must be the ecstasy of her soul at the sight of Him on the throne of His majesty and glory!

But, blessed be GOD, we shall one day, I trust, realise all this for ourselves if we faint not, if we only imitate CHRIST and His faithful Saints. My object then in speaking of such bliss is not to bring down heaven to you, but to raise you even now up to heaven, to quicken you, that is, to imitate those high graces which alone find place in heaven.

And have you no longing desire to join the lovely company of the Saints in heaven? Has the world such gifts to offer, has the Church herself such graces now to show that you should wish to linger in the flesh? No, it is as though the saints had gone from us, gone to "that hill, that heavenly country" afar off, whither Mary has gone. We look in vain for those graces which once so visibly marked the Spouse of CHRIST as they did His holy Mother; it is as though the Church of the First-born were now all gathered up into heaven, and we left below with our half humility, our half faith, our half holiness to talk of, but never taste their joy.

But O let us not despair. Remember, beloved,

to your comfort, that CHRIST is still present with us as He was with the saints. Remember that the HOLY GHOST is still poured out at least on the lowly and meek of heart. He whose mysteries were to be revealed to babes is still present in the Church, though only known by babes. He hides Himself from all but the humble. O then that the HOLY GHOST would pour into your hearts somewhat more of that grace,—the grace of faith to know CHRIST, the grace of humility to worship Him. O that CHRIST may Himself be formed in you, as S. Paul says of his children with whom he travailed in birth, “for though according to the flesh,” saith a holy father, “there is but one Mother of CHRIST, still according to faith the fruit which all bear in their hearts is CHRIST.”

LECTURE IV.

ANNA.

S. LUKE II. 36, 37.

“AND THERE WAS ONE ANNA, A PROPHETESS.
SHE WAS A WIDOW OF ABOUT FOURSORE AND FOUR
YEARS, WHICH DEPARTED NOT FROM THE TEMPLE, BUT
SERVED GOD WITH FASTINGS AND PRAYERS NIGHT AND
DAY. AND SHE COMING IN THAT INSTANT, GAVE
THANKS LIKEWISE UNTO THE LORD, AND SPAKE OF HIM
TO ALL THEM THAT LOOKED FOR REDEMPTION IN JE-
RUSALEM.”

ON Friday last I spoke of the Saintly Elisabeth,—
not only as a sweet model of that humility which
should mark the Christian mother, but also of that
lively faith in the Presence of CHRIST which is the
soul of all who worship in the Mysteries; and in-
deed to-day, in speaking of Anna the next Saint
in the order of the sacred story, I have in like
manner a twofold application to make of her cha-
racter; for as the aged Anna, she is a pattern for
aged piety in particular, but as the devout widow

and prophetess, she may be said to represent the whole body of the faithful. Such at least is the teaching of the ancient Fathers. "In Anna," they say, "we see a distinct type of the Church, waiting for the Coming of CHRIST: crying day and night to Him as the widow in the parable, and watching thereunto with all fasting, supplication and prayer."

And that this is the true character of the Church, now that CHRIST is gone from her into heaven; that she is indeed as the widow waiting for her absent LORD, they point to that very scene of which I spoke on Friday last; I mean the entering in of Zacharias into the Temple or Holy Place, and the waiting of the people for his return.

In that we have, they say, a lively representation of the Church waiting in prayer for CHRIST. As our High Priest He is now gone for a while within the veil; there He stands at the altar of incense as our Intercessor, while the prayers of the Elect, —the saints, penitents, and widows, ascend up through Him from the outer courts of the Eternal Temple, until He come forth in the evening of the world, and in person bless the Israel of God. And can we doubt that among that crowd of holy worshippers who awaited the appearing of Zacharias, was that very widow of whom I am now to speak? We read that "she departed not from the Temple, but served God with fasting and prayer day and night." O we cannot doubt then, that she was present to witness the first notice of the coming

Consolation, as she afterwards was its complete fulfilment in the Presentation of the infant CHRIST in the Temple, and her prayers no doubt went up with those of Zacharias, even as her prophesying was afterwards mingled with that of Simeon ; for, as S. Ambrose observes, "Simeon hath prophesied, a Virgin hath prophesied, the married woman Elisabeth hath prophesied, and now a widow must prophesy, in order that no profession, no sex may be wanting to witness the Advent of the CHRIST. Looking then at Anna as a widow, we have in her that holy character which the Church has ever loved to contemplate as the sad image of herself. The widows, we know, from the Acts of the Apostles, were from the beginning especially sacred in her eyes, while their office was a counterpart of her own. It was one of constant devotion, "to continue," as S. Paul says of the widows, "in supplication and prayer night and day," it was one of charity "to lodge strangers, to bring up children, to relieve the afflicted," it was one also of humility "to wash the Saints' feet:" in short, it was one of general holiness, "to follow diligently every good work."

Such were the aged widows, whom the early Church took under her special charge, and even ordained as deaconesses ; "widows indeed," as S. Paul calls them, and desolate like the Holy Mother of our LORD ; indeed, we may say that the Church's love for the widow dates properly from the Cross : from the hour that CHRIST committed His own desolate Mother to the charge of S. John, the Church

has ever looked upon the widow as an object of the tenderest care and veneration. And as if to guide the Church in the discharge of this sacred trust she has had given to her the several conditions of a Christian widowhood in the one person of Anna. Thus of Anna, we are told that she was of a great age, a widow of about fourscore and four years; and what does S. Paul command, "let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old." Again, Anna, we are told, "departed not from the Temple, but served God night and day." And what again doth S. Paul say, "she that is a widow indeed and desolate trusteth in God and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day." And lastly, Anna is represented as "serving God with fasting;" and what is S. Paul's warning, "The widow that liveth delicately is dead while she liveth."

My duty then to-day is to gather from the character of holy Anna the true portraiture of the aged Christian widow; it is a most beautiful subject, and yet, I fear, one which very few realise at the present day,—indeed, I may say that as the office of the aged deaconess, so even the active character of the Christian widow has well nigh disappeared from amongst us. Thousands there are in this country who bear that sacred name, who are "widows indeed," but never realise the holy functions of their widowhood. Thousands, I say, of forlorn hearts to whom the House of God would be a true home: the love of CHRIST more endear-

ing than that of husband, and the care of His poor more blessed than that of children.

But alas! they are blind to their own blessedness; they see not that GOD has called them, by their very bereavement, to a dispensation of mercy, —to a direct likeness of His widowed spouse, the Church, the holy mother of saints.

O, if there be any here, then, who were once happy, as they thought; happy in a home, happy in a husband, happy in children, but whom GOD hath now stripped of all such earthly happiness, O let them look at Anna. Whence was it, I would ask, that she looked for her consolation? It was not from the world, but from religion; it was not from man, but from GOD. She waited and watched for CHRIST; He was the one object of her prayers in the Temple, the one subject of her conversation in Jerusalem. In short, she felt that heaven was the true home of all her sad longings, and she sought to live there even now by a life of prayer and fasting in the temple of her GOD.

Looking, then, at this holy widow, we learn that the first condition of true Christian widowhood is habitual daily prayer. Now it is the law of CHRIST's kingdom on earth, as it is the life, I may say, of His Church in heaven, to worship night and day—that is, continually. This we may hold to be most certain. The Jewish Church was modelled after the pattern of the heavenly worship; and Anna, in fulfilling the daily services of that temple, was but fulfilling the daily life of the New Jerusalem; for

it is distinctly said of that city, that its temple gates are open all day, and there is no night there.

The worship, then, in heaven is one continual adoration; and the principle, if I may so speak, the one motive principle of such adoration is the Presence of God. But on earth it is not only the Presence of God in the sanctuary, but it is also the Second Coming of CHRIST; it is not only that we praise God in the temple, but we wait for Him there. In other words, the daily supplication of the Church on earth is the utterance of the widow waiting for her LORD's return; it is the daily expression of her unearthly longings. "How is she become as a widow," cries Jeremiah; "she weepeth sore in the night, and the tears are on her cheeks."

But be patient, O most holy mother! One day we know that the cry of thy widowhood will be exchanged for the joyful acclamations of the bride. Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come; and the garments of thy mourning shall be changed into the beautiful robes of thy espousals.

O what a thought is this! what deep meaning does it give to that standing note of the Catholic Church, her daily offices of prayer and praise! We see that it is as children of a widowed Mother that we come here day and night, in winter and in summer, to pray. It is not as the glad children of the world—they are not at home here; it is a dreary, wearisome service for them: it is as the servants of an absent LORD that we watch daily

here for His Coming. "And blessed those servants whom our LORD, when He cometh, shall find so doing."

Think, for instance, of the blessedness of the widow Anna! what reward for all her vigils! what a glorious compensation had she, even in this life, for all her supplications day and night! There were many widows in Israel at the time of CHRIST'S Advent, but to none, save to Anna, it would seem, was the privilege vouchsafed by the HOLY GHOST of coming in at that instant, and seeing the LORD'S CHRIST. O, how will she rise in judgment, and condemn the careless women of this generation! Here was one "of a great age," and so exempt, as we should say, by the law of nature and the pressure of bodily infirmities; and yet no service is without her presence, no vigil without her fasting: night and day is that widowed soul found in the temple waiting, watching for her LORD.

Alas for us in the day of CHRIST! What will He, what will His saints judge of us, who wore the very stones by their perpetual kneeling! Will they even acknowledge us among the number of those who prayed? Where are the lamps of the wise virgins? Where are the torches of the friends of the Bridegroom? Where are the tears of the widowed Spouse? In other words, where are the daily and nightly cries of the penitents, saints, and widows of the Church?

O, what would those saints now answer to the complaints we so often hear against even our morning

and evening services! Should we not hear to our shame, "In the evening, and morning, and noon-day will I pray,"—"Seven times a day do I praise Thee,"—"Mine eyes prevent the night watches,"—"My soul waiteth for the LORD, yea, before the morning watch,"—"My voice shalt Thou hear betimes, O LORD; early in the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee,"—"At midnight will I rise to give thanks to Thee." O what an overwhelming answer! the mere words of Scripture, the simple utterances of the saints of old.

How, then, I ask with the deepest concern, can you hope to rejoice as the children of the bride-chamber,—to be ready at His Coming, who slumber and sleep through the hours of the Church's watching? The Clergy, we know, are bound, as serving sons of that widowed Church; they are bound, by the most sacred obligations of their office, to join day and night in her prayers; and as regards you, the people of God, if the Church does not command your presence by law, she would constrain it by love. And look—see the reward of such voluntary love to the Spouse of CHRIST! See the holy Anna, now that her daily worship has passed within the veil; now that she has realised all her fond desires on earth,—to see the LORD'S CHRIST in His heavenly Temple, with His holy, meek Mother! O, the very thought confounds me! I seem at the moment unable to conceive how any Christian soul, be it aged mother or lone widow, be it son or daughter, married or unmarried,—how any can feel

happy, much less holy, without the daily offering of public prayer and praise.

And yet what was the cry even in the days of S. Chrysostom? "How bitterly have I wept," he says, "to see your zeal when a fellow mortal is preaching; but when the litanies are to be sung, or CHRIST set forth in mysteries, the Church is empty, desolate, forsaken. O, how can God pardon this! "But you will tell me," he says, "I can pray at home." My brother, my sister, you are deceiving yourselves. You can, indeed, pray at home, but not as when in the temple of God. There, you have incentives to devotion which you cannot have elsewhere; the union of thousands of voices in prayer and praise, the unity of thousands of hearts in the bonds of mystical communion, the supplication of the Priest, the Presence of God.

O, let not your public worship, then, be crowded any longer into one day instead of seven! The poor distressed widow can plead the hard world; six whole days is she forced to give to her earthly task-master; but I have no such excuse for the rich widow. However aged you may be, your place is in the house of God; nay, as a Christian widow, you are bound far more than Anna to continue instant, as S. Paul says, "in supplication and prayer night and day."

But there is another condition of Christian widowhood as exemplified in Anna—I mean that of fasting. "For the widow," writes S. Paul, "who lives delicately is dead while she liveth." Now

this duty of habitual abstinence is like that of daily prayer,—a law of holy discipline imposed on us as the children of a widowed Church. “When the Bridegroom,” said our LORD of Himself, “is taken away, then shall they fast in those days.”

What, then, if we ignore this prediction of CHRIST, which is really binding on us as a precept? What, I say, if we ignore it in private? The Church at least is true to her character as the widow; she tells you at this holy season that the Bridegroom is now taken from you; she tells you that the days of fasting are come; she bids you cease from rejoicing; she entreats you to mourn with her,—to watch with her,—to deny your souls their innocent desires,—to deny your bodies some of their natural wants. Such, at least, is her exhortation; for she is not as a stepmother, that she should enforce that which she would win by love. “The love of CHRIST constraineth us.” This is the law of all her voluntary discipline,—the love of her LORD, the love of His Cross, the thought of His privations, the hope of His fulness. “Let every one be persuaded,” she says, “in his own mind.” “Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.”

But the Church would also remind you that fasting has some deep relation to the growth of our spiritual life. That holy cast of character which we see in the saints is seldom, if ever, formed without the habitual exercise of secret discipline. All that sweet sympathy which wins us in those holy

men and women of old ; that gentleness of manner, that subdued, retiring spirit, that long-suffering and charity to the poor ;—all this is the combined result of unwearied devotion and self-chastisement before God. In short, fasting and prayer are so related, that in their spirit, quality, and effect they fall and rise together. Prayer without mortification soon becomes formalism ; mortification without prayer soon ends in deadly pride ; but of the two together we say that they serve to form that saintly character which we love to gaze on in others, but shrink from forming in ourselves.

O, if it be only, then, as a safeguard to your habitual prayer, I would enjoin upon you not only the obligations of Lent, but of the fasts throughout the year. Imitate, I would say to you all, but especially to the widows, imitate the holy Anna in her daily supplications ; imitate her also in her habitual self-denial. Ask yourselves, as those who are now passing to your last rest,—or rather, I should say, hastening to your last account,—whether the full easy life you now live is such as you will wish it to have been when you come to stand before CHRIST and His risen saints ? Amidst the doubts and agonies of that day, what would you then give for one forty days' fast with CHRIST in the wilderness,—nay, for one vigil only with the holy Anna in the temple of God on earth !

And now, in conclusion, is there, I would ask, a more blessed sight than that of the aged saint,—one whose daily conversation is already in heaven ?

one who not only acts as becometh the saint in all fasting and prayer, but who lives and speaks as one whose heart is like that of the holy Anna; too full of the one thought of redemption to speak of any other.

It was not, then, without great meaning that S. Paul warned the widows of the Church against idle talking,—wandering about from house to house, speaking things which they ought not. It is as though he said, “It is impossible for you to mix much with the world, or even with one another, and still retain a heart for heavenly meditation, or a tongue for holy prayer. The sacredness of your character as holy women, but especially as widows, is marred by the frivolous conversation of the world; you lose that silent, retiring spirit which marks the widowed soul who lives near to God,—who loves His Presence, and looks and longs for His Appearing.”

O, let me beseech you, then, sisters and mothers in CHRIST, “to continue instant in all supplication and prayer;” remembering that the most perfect prayers are those of children who have not yet known the world, and of saints who have renounced it. Wait, I would say, for CHRIST, in all fasting and supplication. “The Messenger of the Covenant, Whom ye delight in; behold, He shall come, saith the LORD.”

And O, what shall then be your joy! what shall then be the reward for all your vigils now! It shall be that of the holy Anna, to see

Him at last—the desire of your eyes, the object of all your sad longings and years of prayer; to see Him, I say, but not alone: with His holy Mother, with His beloved Spouse, with ten thousand of His saints,—with them shall you see CHRIST,—with them shall you enter into the heavenly temple; joying before Him, and speaking of Him to all those who once looked for, and shall have found at last with you, redemption in Jerusalem.

LECTURE V.

MARTHA AND MARY.

S. LUKE X. 41, 42.

“MARTHA, MARTHA, THOU ART CAREFUL AND TROUBLED ABOUT MANY THINGS, BUT ONE THING IS NEEDFUL; AND MARY HATH CHOSEN THAT GOOD PART WHICH SHALL NOT BE TAKEN AWAY FROM HER.”

IN my introductory Lecture on the holy women of the Gospel, I spoke of them generally as those who ministered to CHRIST'S sorrows,—they were the last, I said, to follow Him with all the devotion of their sex up the hill of Calvary, the first to watch and weep at His tomb. And such I may say has been my leading thought even in the two preceding lectures on Elisabeth and Anna. I have sought to prepare you by the study of those elder saints for the contemplation of still higher devotion as exhibited in the Mary who sat at JESUS' feet, Mary Magdalene who knelt weeping there, and lastly the

Virgin Mary herself, whose sorrows as she stood at the Cross, I have purposely reserved for our contemplation with those of her crucified Son in Holy Week. And indeed we have now arrived, I think, at the point where the Cross comes distinctly into view. We cannot forget, for instance, that it was in the house of Bethany, the home of Martha and Mary, that Jesus lodged each night during the week of His Passion; we cannot forget that in that Mary, the Church has ever seen the type of the silent crucified life; while in the combined characters of the two sisters, Martha and Mary, she has realised that most beautiful form of contemplative and active life, I mean the Sister of Mercy.

O it is indeed a beautiful picture, that of the Christian sister sitting like Mary at Jesus' feet, and yet rising at His call to minister like Martha to Him in His poor and penitent ones. In what one character, I would ask, can we better realise at the present day those two distinct elements of the religious life, nay, in what other character but that of the Sister of Mercy are both strictly possible? In social life we admit there are many blessed opportunities for showing love; but let the parent herself say whether the social life is such as to admit that combination of passive devotion to God and active charity to man which S. Paul speaks of in such terms of praise when he says, "the unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit."

No, it is no disparagement to the Christian parent to say "that the married woman careth for the things of the world," that the care of her family limits the active charity of the mother to those more immediately around her and belonging to her; that it is in the widow and unmarried alone that we fully realise that most lovely creation of the Church of CHRIST, the devoted, disinterested Sister of Charity. In fact, we may say, that no one but they who are free from the world's ties and trials are able to fulfil the Church's unwearied ministry of love. They alone can "devote themselves in body and spirit," as S. Paul says, and "without distraction to the things of the LORD."

Thus of one, we read that so long as the world had any hold on her affection she could not enter either on the active or devotional duties of such a Sister. "On one side," she says, "I was called as it were by God, on the other side I was tempted by regrets for the world; I wished to combine my aspirations towards heaven with my earthly sympathies, and I found that this was impossible. I had not as yet the calm satisfaction of a soul reconciled to God, neither could I taste those pleasures which were offered by the world: in the midst of pious meditations, and prayers, nay, the very services of the Church, I was impatient until relieved from duties to which I could give but half of my heart. But at length God took pity on me; I read the Confessions of S. Augustine; I saw how he had been tempted by the world, how he had been tried, and at length

how he had conquered it." And then she tells us how she schooled herself to her heavenly but hard lot,—first by prayer, and then by active charity:—when her mind was calm she would sit like Mary at JESUS' feet, when disturbed, she sought relief, as it were, with Martha in the practice of works of charity as unto CHRIST; she laboured with her own hands, she tried to fix her thoughts on others."

Such then is the subject suggested by the history of the two sisters at Bethany—a subject, I would observe, of the deepest interest at the present day when the wants of the Church of England call so loudly for the services of devoted women. But before I take that combined view of the two sisters at Bethany which gives us the true portraiture of the Sister of Mercy, I would treat of them separately, so far as they represent to us the ACTIVE and CONTEMPLATIVE life; for both of these are as I hope to show, blessed elements in the life of her who exercises them; but that of Mary is the more blessed, the better part of the two. And if you would inquire why it is the more blessed, I would answer with S. Gregory, "the reason why Mary's part is the better of the two is, because it shall never be taken from her." "Active life," he adds, "ceases with the body, for who in his eternal home shall provide bread for the hungry where no one hungers? Who shall provide drink for the thirsty where no one thirsts? With the present world then our active life is taken away, but our

contemplative life is here only begun that it may be perfected in our heavenly home."

First, then, I would speak of the ACTIVE life of which Martha by herself is a type. Now Martha was one those of whom there are no doubt many amongst yourselves—Christian women upon whom has devolved some family or domestic charge; who have had work assigned you of GOD to do in the world—work from which you would perhaps be willingly released if it were GOD's will. In short, like Martha, you cumber yourselves not so much with devotional as with domestic toils; you labour to serve CHRIST not so much in His poor as in your own households. For I am not one of those, who think that Martha was ignorant of the one thing needful because she thought other things also matters of duty; the rebuke which she received was rather for her chiding tone to Mary than for her much serving of CHRIST. He at least was one in Whose service all the duties of life would be blessed and sanctified, and could "JESUS have loved Martha" had He not discovered in her something at least of Mary's more devout spirit?

Taking, then, this view of her character, is not the life of Martha, I would ask, a blessed one of its kind,—to be cumbered, indeed, with worldly duties, but still not altogether careless about the things of heaven;—seeing CHRIST in those around, serving a husband in the LORD, listening to Him and for Him in every home duty which comes to hand? Thus of S. Catharine it has

been said, that "while preparing for her father's meals, she would imagine that she was preparing it for our SAVIOUR, her mother holding the place of the Virgin Mary, and her brothers that of the Apostles: thus she served, like another Martha, the whole court of heaven in spirit." What then if Mary does certainly gain the praise of our LORD? still there must be the serving of Martha. Our Blessed LORD expressly says that we may be, nay, we must be, *in* the world, but He guards us against being *of it*; so loving it, that is, so giving ourselves to it, as to leave no place whatever for religion. Now this was not at least always the case with Martha.

It was on the occasion, you will remember, of her brother Lazarus' death that she was the first in her devotion to CHRIST. As soon as she heard that JESUS was coming, she went in her holy zeal and met Him, while Mary sat still in the house. What then is it which gives such sweet attraction to the better part of Mary? It is simply that which S. Gregory mentions,—its eternity: once begun on earth, it shall never be taken away, no, not in heaven. And yet of those many who have no necessary calls, like Martha:—who have been spared the fretting cares of a household or family, O how few do we see with Mary at JESUS' feet? How is it they do not choose her better, her eternal part? Take, for instance, those of whom I lately spoke so much, the widows of the Church. How many are there whose life once so active for another, has

now no living object but self to minister to. How might such women win to themselves the eternal praise of Mary, if like Anna they would serve God in prayer night and day? Or take again the unmarried; of them S. Paul speaks, "as caring for the things of the LORD, that they may be holy both in body and spirit." And then, as if he had the very example of the devout Mary before his eyes, he adds, "this I speak for your profit, that ye may attend upon the LORD without distraction." O, there are many, whose whole life might be one continued, undisturbed sitting at JESUS' feet; who if they had no heart for active charity, might at least serve God daily in meditation and prayer. And what new life, what new joys, what new hopes, would it give you to consecrate to God the morning of your life, much more the few last years of your declining life! to enter, though late, into the school of JESUS and sit with Mary at His feet; to become as children again, daily hearers of His Word, silent worshippers of His Presence.

You know how cumbered you once were; without an hour, as you used to think, for yourselves or for your God. Now, therefore, that you are freed at last from such cares, listen to CHRIST. "The Master is come and calleth for you;" arise then, I would say, and serve Him while as yet He will accept your service. And O think not that service a useless, cheerless one: it was not to waste life, but to win life, that Mary chose her good part. No, if they are blessed who can snatch from the world a

little time each morning and night for CHRIST, how sevenfold blessed are they who without breach of domestic or other duty, can put aside all worldly things and sit ever silent, ever adoring, ever listening at the feet of CHRIST.

Such then are Martha and Mary, as they represent to us the active and the contemplative life; I have spoken of both as blessed in their work, and beloved of CHRIST. In speaking then, as I would now wish to do of the Sister of Mercy, I shall be at once acquitted of teaching that the plain and urgent duties of home are to be wantonly set aside for the religious rule. For those who with Mary deliberately choose that rule,—who without any dereliction of duty are free to serve GOD in works of active charity as well as prayer: for such there is, we hold, the direct sanction of Scripture. We believe that “within the Church of GOD every form of religious life, married or single, at home or in a community, in the midst of the world or in seclusion from it, may find its place and its joys;” we believe that the several states of life which CHRIST sanctified by His Presence: whether it be that of the Bride at Cana, the two Sisters at Bethany, or the Marys who left their homes and ministered to Him from Galilee; that all these states of life are sanctified still,—still full of the deepest blessing to those who duly fulfil them, and that it is the duty of the Church to sanctify, not only one, but all of them so far as she can, to her own most blessed work. And when, I

would ask, since the days of Phœbe, Priscilla, and the deaconesses of the early Church, was there such need of the ministry of devoted women as now? Can the Church long rest content with her modern system of district visitation? Can they do the work of Sisters who can only give a portion of their time consistently with home duties?—No, they cannot, however great their zeal, however burning their love, the world must still divide their time with the Church, and the consequence is that not only is a spiritual loss incurred by the Church herself, but a painful feeling of inefficiency arises in the persons themselves who visit, a daily sense of the imperfection of what is done by snatches during the intervals of worldly or domestic engagement; in a word, while I would thankfully acknowledge and co-operate with the services of those holy women who labour much with us in the LORD, I cannot but regard the whole system as a poor substitute for that ministry which the Church Catholic has ever realised in the Sisters of Mercy; I cannot but pray for the time when they shall be found again in every great city; no longer acting as they do now in some instances without the sanction of the Church's authority, and I had almost said by stealth, but openly as the recognised beloved handmaids of the Spouse of CHRIST. Now if such be our view of Christian Sisterhoods, it is evident, that the work which we expect from them is not that of Mary only, or of Martha only; but of both Martha and Mary: indeed the active ser-

vice of the one Sister would soon become worldly without the spiritual devotion of the other. They who labour much for GOD soon find the need of increased Communion with Him; in short, it is so far with the ministering Sisters as with the Minister of GOD himself: their influence on others will ever rise or fall with the growth of the spiritual life within themselves.

And O if the women of this country knew the blessedness of the devoted, religious life—how it shuts out the fretting sorrows of the world; how it gives to those who seek it, and give themselves humbly to it, a foretaste of their home in heaven, we should not find, I think, such a lack of holy souls devoted to the recovery of the penitent or the visitation of the sick. Alas! for our love—alas! for our obedience. How far behind the first love of the Church are we. The early Fathers, we know, love to speak of the house at Bethany, as a house of obedience. They call it “heaven and earth, as though all that is holy, pure, and devout were to be found under that one roof. And what is it to minister to CHRIST in His poor? What is it to sit daily at His feet? What are these but the two sweetest fruits of obedience? what are charity and devotion, but as those two sister virtues which CHRIST especially loves?”

See then, dear sisters in CHRIST, that ye love the contemplative as well as active life; I do not press any of you to become Sisters of Mercy; if GOD calls you, arise, I would say, and obey His

call; but I do press on you the necessity of imitating their graces: a few centuries ago, remember, and Martha and Mary walked in Bethany as sisters. They now walk in the heavenly Jerusalem as Saints. They are gone to their rest, but the fragrance of their good deeds, the box of ointment and the whole ministry of their love still fills the house of Bethany;—that alone is not gone, that at least shall never be forgotten,—for “wheresoever the Gospel is preached, that which these holy women have done is spoken of for a memorial of them.”

LECTURE VI.

S. MARY MAGDALENE.

S. JOHN XIX. 25.

“NOW THERE STOOD BY THE CROSS OF JESUS HIS MOTHER AND HIS MOTHER’S SISTER, MARY THE WIFE OF CLEOPHAS, AND MARY MAGDALENE.”

THE character of S. Mary Magdalene is best read by the light of the Cross of CHRIST. As she stands penitent beneath that Cross with the other two Marys, bedewing even then the feet of JESUS with her tears, and while He is seen stretching out His hands over her in death still to bless, still to absolve her to the last,—in all this, we have her character clearly delineated as it were in one act.

We remember, for instance, her self-accusation in the house of Simon the Pharisee, how she broke through the crowd and braved the shame of public confession; what depth then does that her first act of confession gather from the still more open shame, the still more public derision of the Cross.

Again we remember the costly sacrifice of the ointment in that same house of Simon, with what love she was prompted to lavish all that she had, as it were, in one costly gift on the head of CHRIST. And what else does her love at the Cross tell us? how still less does she there calculate the waste as she pours out, as it were, her whole being in an act of pure self-oblation at the feet of CHRIST! To-day, then, I would speak of Mary Magdalene simply as the penitent of the Cross, but before entering into the nature of her repentance, I would ask you to gaze for a few moments on the whole sacred group on Calvary. And O, what a living record have we here of the mercy of CHRIST and mighty power of His Cross to heal! In that company of the pure and penitent we have fulfilled that His most blessed promise, "And I, if I be lifted up will draw all men unto Me." For look at that group beneath the Cross,—of what does it consist? of maiden chastity in the person of the Virgin Mary, sacred marriage in the person of Mary Salome, and saving penitence in the person of the woman that was a sinner. O the mighty power, we again cry, of the Cross of CHRIST! What grace of penitence, what fulness of absolution streams from it, healing all, even the most diseased of sinners, knitting all the elect together as saints or penitents even on earth in one holy company, with the Lamb in the midst.

What then, I would ask, if your sin be one of seven-fold intensity,—sin like that of Mary Magdalene out of whom went seven devils; what if it

be sin of the most deliberate forethought and habit; sin done in the light and against the light—still there is virtue in the Passion of the Cross to cancel the guilt for ever; she that stood with the pure Virgin Mother by the Cross of Jesus, had passed, we have every reason to believe, through the worst revels of a harlot life; but now behold her, meet for the sacred company of the Mother of her LORD. Behold her standing by the very side of the Blessed Virgin, all cleansed, all forgiven in the blood of those five hallowed Wounds, a living witness, we may say, of the efficacy of the Atonement, the grace of true repentance, and the cleansing nature of absolution, "Woman, thy sins are forgiven thee."

Now of the leading features of Mary Magdalene's repentance, the only one that I would mention to-day is her self-accusation; indeed it has been beautifully said in reference to her self-accusing spirit, that "the kingdom of CHRIST consists on earth, at least, of those who accuse themselves. There are those indeed on high pure and unfallen, namely, the holy angels, who have never sinned. There are those again in Paradise, the spirits of the just made perfect, fallen once, but sinless now; and lastly there are those on earth fallen and sinful, still, like Mary, kneeling, repenting, and weeping at the foot of the Cross, ever accusing themselves before God day and night."

Such is CHRIST's kingdom of the Cross, part in heaven, arrayed in the white garment of the virgin

soul, part waiting on earth in the sackcloth and garb of the penitent; for the greatest saints, we must ever remember, are at best but as penitents here below; they are not exempt from the law of self-accusation, nay, it seems to press more heavily on them in proportion to their saintliness. The more they live by the rule of the Cross, the clearer do they see by its light the hidden sinfulness of their nature. O no wonder then that the Saints should be the first to court that shame of confession which reveals their guilt while it rids them of it.

Thus to take the case of Mary Magdalene—here was a deeply sullied soul, a byword among men; well known, and pointed at as the woman that was a sinner; and yet, see that woman! she allows no false shame to hide that which was her true shame; “she who had been so barefaced in perdition is now as bold in the work of her salvation:” she might have sought the secrecy of private confession; like Nicodemus, she might have watched the SAVIOUR on His return home by night; but no, she chooses a festal hour in Simon’s house; in the sight of all the guests she breaks through to the presence of her LORD. He had roused her to know her real misery; some piercing word, some searching, loving look of His had touched her soul to the quick; hence her sudden remorse which no publicity could check; “she stands at His feet behind Him weeping,” she falls down at those feet, she makes of them for herself an altar, as S. Paulinus says, “on which to offer the

libation of her tears, the sacrifice of her troubled spirit."

Such then the self-accusing spirit not only of Mary Magdalene but of all the greatest Saints: a spirit which the Church, we know, sought for centuries to retain by means of her public confession of sins. The penitents, we are told, would cast themselves down in the porch of the church, clinging to the feet of the people for their prayers, and of the priests for their absolution.

Hence those words of S. Augustine, "Let the soul, he says, "which would be delivered from her wickedness, believe with all assurance; let her approach the feet of CHRIST; let her seek His footsteps; let her confess in pouring out tears upon them and wipe them with her sinful hair; the feet of the LORD are the preachers of the gospel;" O for this spirit of the Magdalene in these days of too shallow repentance! for how do we now hide our wounds! how do we now shrink from private self-accusation; and is not this some test that the spirit of the Magdalene, if not gone altogether, has at least given way to the mind of Simon?

Yes, that Pharisee still speaks in the mouth of many a caviller at the present day; "who can forgive sins but GOD alone? There are many, that is, outwardly righteous; men and women who are free perhaps from gross sin, and therefore at liberty, as they think, to deny the use of that of which they personally do not feel the need. Their conscience, it may be, calls not at least so loudly, for the search-

ing discipline of shame and confession. But why then, we ask in all the charity of CHRIST, why speak against those poor afflicted souls who do feel the need of it? why contradict that holy ordinance which whatever its abuses in modern times, CHRIST has still left, and the Church still retains as one of the sweetest, safest channels of His forgiving love to the sinner? O if such persons had, I will not say the sin, but the love of Mary Magdalene, they would not speak or think as they do now of that Apostolic ordinance! "Behold," they would say with S. Paul, "ye have sorrowed after a godly sort; what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what zeal; yea, what self-accusation or revenge! in all these things ye have approved yourselves."

O let us take heed to the real needs of our sinning souls; the spirit of Mary Magdalene is that which becomes each one of you who has but one heavy sin on his or her conscience. And by the spirit of Mary Magdalene, I mean, the spirit of her love and compunction. For, "stop not," says S. Augustine, "at the tears which flow from her eyes: the tears of the heart which are much more precious, preceded and produced the others; her heart was penetrated with the deepest sorrow, inflamed with the most burning love. We must not wonder then if her eyes shed tears; wouldest thou obtain the pardon of thy sins? keep silence like Mary Magdalene, let thine heart confess and thine eyes speak; the former by sorrows and sighs, the latter by

tears,—this is the real way to touch the Heart of God.”

And now, in what degree are you following the spirit of this holy penitent? Tradition, we know, speaks of her as retiring to the desert, but that is only tradition, and however beautiful the picture of the solitary Magdalene with her cross may be, it is one of too high a self-sacrifice to be our example. No, I ask not of you her self-oblation, but her loving self-accusation; where, I ask, are those acts of love and penitence which mark a soul like hers: a soul which measures all it does—all it gives, by the mercy and pardon it has received; a soul which “loveth much, because it has been forgiven much.”

And what of those little sacrifices of your vanity which you occasionally do make? what, I would ask, is the motive? is it love of CHRIST, is it sorrow for sin, is it purpose to resist sin, is it revenge for sin? Take away all that is exacted of you by fear of reproof, interest, love of reputation, self-respect, force of custom, the rules of society, and what one thing would be found remaining of which you could say, “I have given up this vain indulgence for CHRIST, a poor sacrifice in itself, but such as I could make,—I have done it in love to Him.” And yet this is the blessed feature of Mary Magdalene’s sacrifice.

“It was her love,” writes a holy Father, “which found the secret of converting all the charms of her person into a sacrifice for her sins; her heart, her

eyes, her tongue, her hair, her perfumes, all these were made by her to bear marks of her penitence and love. Tears are not sufficient for her love," he says, "she would sacrifice that vanity which had wrought her ruin: with her mouth she is silent and kisses His Feet, with her hair, that accomplice in her sin, she wipes His Feet, with her guilty perfumes she anoints them."

What then, if you have not sinned deeply, what if you have no startling sins, where then are your offerings of gratitude? but if you have such sins, where, I ask, is now your self-accusation? O be never, never content, until you have sorrowed after her godly sort: sin calls for self-accusation; sin calls for self-sacrifice and the whole discipline of repentance, the soul of contrition and deeds of love. What then, I again ask, if you have no sins like those of the poor Magdalene to confess? "Still the mere fact," it has been well said, "that you have been spared those sins, would show the great grace God has given you, and therefore how much you should bewail even little sins committed in despite of that grace! But is it really true, O brother or sister in CHRIST, that you have no such sins? not in thought, not in desire, not even in imagination? Believe me, you may be more deeply defiled than she who was a sinner; remember, that in God's eyes,—who knew what was in Mary's heart, and knows what we all are,—spiritual sins are more heinous than fleshly ones; remember that the secret self-righteousness, the lurking lust, is

more deadly and dangerous than the grosser sin which alarms the conscience; the one may lead us to confession and pardon, while Simon, it is to be feared, only learnt the need of both when it was all too late. O the mercy then of the Cross of CHRIST! what power has it to quicken the sinner to repentance! what grace to impart true peace! at its foot, as at the feet of Him Who hung on it, Whose Blood endued it with its saving power—may we be all cleansed from the deep dye of the darkest sin—from the damning stain of it hereafter, if not from the clinging associations of it now. For alas! sin will still cleave to us even when forgiven! there is no escape from its hateful presence in this life. In the day of judgment we believe that every soul will be at last made spotless through the Blood of the Lamb, even in its own sight. The scars, the soils, the defilement of past sin: all the foul deposit of impurity of which it never could rid its imagination; all the wanderings of concupiscence, the heat of passion, the guilty associations of mind; all these shall then at last flee before the sign of the Son of Man like mists before the rising Sun. The Spirit shall breathe over the new creation as it is gathered in one by one, soul by soul, saint by saint, penitent by penitent. That HOLY SPIRIT, I say, shall then purge out once and for ever even the remembrance of past evil; “and in that morning of the Regeneration, O what miracles of purification shall we see! There shall be Rahab, the Magdalene, the Samaritan

woman, it may be, and she that was left alone in the Temple; forming, if I may so speak, a living eternal record of CHRIST's love and the cleansing power of the Cross—presenting to the assembled universe the gathered history of His Mystical Body, which is the Church; that Blessed Mother of the pure as well as of the penitent: all alike perfect, all alike without fault before the throne of God and of the Lamb."

LECTURE VII.

THE SORROWS OF OUR LORD'S MOTHER.

S. LUKE II. 35.

“YEA, A SWORD SHALL PIERCE THROUGH THY OWN SOUL
ALSO.”

IN speaking of the holy women who stood by the Cross of JESUS, we may say of Mary Magdalene that her character is best read by the light of that Cross. Standing as a penitent beneath that Cross, while her LORD is seen stretching forth His hands in death over her, still to bless, still to absolve her to the last; in all this we have her character as the forgiven penitent clearly delineated as it were in one act. And it is thus that I would speak to-day of the holy Mother who stood by her side. Her character of meekness is best seen at the Annunciation, but it is by looking at the Cross of her Divine Son, it is only by the reflected light of His last sufferings on Calvary that we can enter at one view into the accumulated sorrows of this holy Mother. Sharp indeed and frequent had been the

forebodings of such sorrows, even from the Cradle to the Cross; she could not forget that strange prophecy of the aged Simeon, "Behold this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against."

And O, how often had she heard Him spoken against, but never so fearfully, never so horribly as in the blasphemies of the multitude, the railing of the thief, and the taunts of the priests beneath the Cross on Calvary. And then those last ominous words of the aged prophet, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also." O how often had she felt the piercings of that mysterious sword, but never so keenly, never with such real anguish of soul as when she beheld the crown of thorns, the hands and the feet nailed to the Cross, the very heart of her first-born Son pierced with the soldier's spear; then it was that we may conceive of her as swooning in an agony of grief, for "the iron had entered into her soul."

For think now even of the mother's natural feelings at such a moment! Here, remember, was not the protracted agony of a sick bed, which is heart-rending enough for the poor mother,—here was no death-bed, I say, however painful, no gathering up of the beloved Sufferer's feet, no bedside ministrings to the parched fainting body. No, there hung her Son in all the distended agony of the Cross,—there she stood helpless to alleviate it, nay more, as if to mock her tender solicitude they even sport with His bodily torments. He cannot

cry, for instance, in her hearing, "I thirst," but they must mock His parched lips; He cannot bow His bleeding Head in her sight, but they must taunt Him "to come down from the Cross."

O was there not enough here to pierce that Mother's soul! "How can I tell of thy sorrows, holy Mary," saith a devout writer speaking of her accumulated anguish, "we see thee following thy Son up the hill of shame; we see thee standing beside Him, while He, thine own Flesh is stripped, laid bare upon the Cross, nailed wound by wound between those criminals. O how wast thou able at that afflicting moment to stand listening to the blows of that hammer, those shouts of the people, those raileries of the priests, nay, His own last words to thee—had He not even in His dying hour a more endearing name for thee? 'O go, thou mother, to the house of thy new adopted son; another must henceforth address thee by that title which thine own Son would seem at first to refuse.'

O it was indeed a sharp Cross, a piercing sword to that holy Virgin Mother. Whence then was her strength to bear it? What was the secret of her resignation and silence? It was that deep sympathy which we see to perfection in the Man of Sorrows, but in part only in His Saints,—that heavenly grief which rises or falls with the intensity of our personal sanctity and fellowship with the sufferings of the Cross—in short, her sorrow was not of nature only but of grace.

Now a mother's natural sorrow, whether it be at the death of her first-born, or when in travail at his birth, no one but the mother herself can feel or express; indeed it is said of our LORD "that He saw of the travail of His soul and was satisfied," as though no grief could be more acute in itself, more piercing than that of the sorrowing mother, the mother's travail is used to express the intense unknown agony of CHRIST's soul in death.

Here then was one element of the sorrow of the holy Mother of our LORD, one ingredient of her bitter cup, one pang from that piercing sword, namely, sorrow for her first-born. Hence the force of those words of the Prophet Zechariah, "They shall look upon Him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him as one that is in bitterness for her first-born."

But the bitter anguish of this holy Mother lay deeper than mere natural sorrow. There is a sorrow which is the pure fruit of grace—a sorrow which pierces deeper into the soul as it ranks higher in a moral point of view than any which results from our natural affections. The sympathy of the mother we know is to be found even in the lower animals; we cannot think therefore that that is the highest form of sympathy or sorrow. Nay, it is, we believe, its lowest form; being an animal instinct, and not a grace, it originates in nature, and need not rise above it; it has not the depth, it cannot have

the divinity, if I may so speak, of sanctified grief. How cold, for instance, how little consoling in our crosses and sufferings are worldly friends or relations; ay, even a worldly-minded mother sometimes with all her natural love—take even the kindest-hearted, the most solicitous of them who minister to us at such an hour of bodily or mental anguish, O how little do they enter into our sorrows, how utterly do they fail to impart the comfort or the healing power of the Cross!

And why is this? because they lack that which is the very soul of Christian sorrow or sympathy with suffering. I mean, deep spiritual sanctity of life. Such persons may be kind mothers, kind friends, kind Christians, but they are not as the Saints of God; they have not that divine soul of pity which is itself for the most part the sanctified fruit of personal suffering, the direct impress, if I may so speak, of the Cross of CHRIST. In short, it is most certain, I think, that sorrow or sympathy in its deepest sense becomes more intense, more real, in proportion to the reality, the intensity of our own personal holiness; it is in the grace of Divine charity, it is not in mere natural love that we find real sorrow and compassion,—that tenderness and trembling of hand in touching, talking of or even looking on the wounds of others. Now I know that no such sympathy as I now speak of, was perfect but that of CHRIST; of Him we know that He was perfectly holy, perfectly without sin: this we cannot say of His Holy Virgin Mother;

we do not ascribe any actual sin to her, we know of none, we are not told of any, we dare not think of any in regard to her most sacred person; but her sorrow or sympathy with her Son's sufferings, could not be that perfect thing it was in Him, "for "even the holiest," it has been said, "must be delivered from the knowledge of sin before their sympathy is raised towards CHRIST's unapproachable tenderness. His spotless Sanctity alone flows forth with the fullest stream of sorrow and compassion." Looking then at the holy Mother as she stood sorrowing at the Cross of her Son, I would say that hers was not merely the natural sorrow of the parent; it was this indeed, but something more; still less can we say that it was the sorrow of those who suffer from the burden of sin. For "who can estimate the holiness and purity of her who was chosen out of the world to be the Mother of CHRIST;"—if "to him that hath more is given," if "grace is given for grace," what must have been her transcendent sanctity at the death of her Son, who was so full of grace at His Birth! And if such her personal sanctity, O, what, we say, must have been the heavenly sorrow of her soul! a sorrow which if it began in nature, was at least perfected only in grace—a sorrow which a mother need not feel with all her mere natural affection for her suffering child; a sorrow of the Saints, nay, of the holy Angels themselves as they gazed on CHRIST's accumulated sufferings on the Cross. Now it is this sorrow or sympathy with suffering in its highest form

which constitutes the fellowship with CHRIST's Cross, and it is in this fellowship with Him in suffering, that we must look for the piercing anguish of this Holy Mother; in a word, she partook not indeed in the Atoning sorrows of the Cross, for she was not herself without sin,—but still she had part in the real hidden anguish of the Cross; the sword which pierced her Son was to “pierce her own soul also;” she was to have, that is, a real fellowship in His more inmost suffering, I do not say of body but of soul.

And that this was the literal meaning of Simeon's prophecy, may be gathered from the secrecy of that holy Mother's sorrows. The very silence of Scripture seems to mark the deep, hidden agony of her soul; she utters indeed no cry, no groans, not even a word; at least, we read of none. They offer to her indeed, no provocation as they do to Him; she is not racked in body as He is; nay, she is suffered to stand peaceably at the foot of the Cross. But was not this, of itself one of her sharpest sorrows? not to suffer with Him, not to partake of His Bodily as she did of His mental Crucifixion? If S. Paul could say, “I fill up what is behind of CHRIST's sufferings in my flesh, for His Body's sake, the Church,” what shall we say of that Mother when in sight of those very sufferings? did she not partake of His spiritual Cross, did she not burn to do so! “O there is many a sorrow hidden from the world's hard gaze, many a stifled groan, many a piercing of heart by

the thorns and nails, and spear of our common griefs, which not the less if borne in silence for CHRIST, make us to partake of His mysterious Cross." Of weak women, it has been especially said, that "although unseen by the world; although moving in silence and a veil, they have both carried their Cross with CHRIST, and on it hung beside Him. "They have died with Him in will and in the sacrifice of self; in short, it is not so much by sufferings in the body as in the spirit, that we are likened to CHRIST. The railing thief, for instance, was conformed to the visible Passion of CHRIST; he suffered the very same bodily torture, thirst, racking of limbs, but he had no part after all in His Crucifixion. S. John and the Blessed Virgin, on the other hand, did not suffer in the flesh; yet they were truly nailed, pierced, crucified with CHRIST upon the Cross. O, there is a deep, veiled mystery in the sorrows of this Holy Mother of our LORD! we only see their dim outline; we only catch them, as it were, by reflection from the Cross,—from the sorrows and sufferings, the agony and Crucifixion of her dear Son. But so it was, I would observe, with Abraham on the Mount Moriah; nothing is said of the piercing of his soul at the sacrifice of his only son Isaac; and yet, can we think, that Abraham with all his faith, all his love, had no sorrow?—did not the knife, as he lifted it up to slay his son, pierce his own soul also? no, it was not that he had no conflict of soul, but strength of faith to resist and silence

it; like Mary, he followed his son as he bare the wood for his own sacrifice; like Mary, he ascended the Mount of Sacrifice; like her he stood by the altar, and if God took the Lamb from her and restored it back to him—it was not that she did not will as much as Abraham the painful sacrifice of her Son; awful as the thought is, still we cannot but think that she crushed her feelings as a mother, and rejoiced in the obedience of her Son, even unto death.

Such then were the mysterious sorrows of the holy Mother so far as we can gather them from what would seem to be the purposed reserve of Scripture. They are not those, remember, of the mother only, still less are they those of a sorrow-stricken sinner; but they are the sorrows of the saint who through grace has attained to a real, though hidden fellowship with the Man of Sorrows.

O draw near then to the Cross of CHRIST, stand not always afar off; draw nearer and nearer with those holy women as the closing hour of CHRIST's death is coming on. Remember that the religion of JESUS does not consist in the poetry or beautiful imagery of devotion, but in a close fellowship with CHRIST's sorrows. It was our sins, remember, which pierced the sinless JESUS to the soul, which pointed every thorn in His crown, and wrung from Him that bitter cry of desolation on the Cross.

O let us then seek fellowship with CHRIST's sorrows, if not as saints, at least as sinners. Love

is still a real personal affection though the Cross on Calvary be gone; love can still bleed for JESUS though His wounds be stanchèd; love can still suffer with JESUS as for a dear friend who has himself died to save us; love will still linger as it were along the way of sorrows, still go and gaze on the Cross, still cling to its foot as the sweetest token on earth of a crucified forgiving SAVIOUR.

O let your love then, I would say, have her perfect work. For many, I admit, enter in some degree into the sorrows of this Holy week—by acts of love and devotion, they learn somewhat of the bitterness of the Cross; “they stand afar off” and gaze on the form of the Crucified; but when love bids them draw near to the Cross, nay, when their very sins would force them to cling to that Cross of self-denial as their only hope, they draw back, and shrink from close personal fellowship with the sorrows of CHRIST.

But remember of whom it is said that they shall look on Him Whom they pierced, and mourn for Him as one in bitterness for his first-born. Is it not said of those who despise the Cross of CHRIST? who bid CHRIST come down from it? who would have us give up all voluntary fellowship with the hungering, thirsting, suffering body of CHRIST? O, brethren, the day is fast coming when the sign of the Son of Man shall be again seen on high in all the blackness of the Passion. Then shall the sinner enter at last into the real meaning of that Cross. Then shall he desire to see “one of the

days of the Son of Man," days of sorrow, days of fasting, days of suffering, and shall not see it. Then shall he enter, alas! too late into the sorrows of the holy Mother as she bewailed her First-born on Calvary. In a word, the Cross shall press on him at last, the sword shall pierce him at last, even to the dividing of body and soul, "a sword, a sword," as the Prophet cries, "is sharpened, it is sharpened to make a sore slaughter,—should we then make mirth?"

GOD grant that we may all have grace to draw near each day, not of this Holy week only, but of our whole life to the foot of the Cross of CHRIST. May He strengthen us as He did that holy Mother to bear the sorrows which He Himself may lay upon our souls; for remember, that if we feel not somewhat of her sympathy with CHRIST's sufferings on the Cross, whether it be on the day of CHRIST's death, the day of our own death, or that Day of Judgment when all the tribes of the earth shall mourn because of Him, it is because we have failed in His sanctity and love, Who hung as a bleeding Lamb upon it.



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